



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by OSCE Head of Mission to Bosnia, Ambassador Douglas Davidson

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 17, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Whenever I am in this plenary hall I feel like I am with members of a very important family and that is even more so with Ambassador Davidson here with us, so welcome again and thank you for being here.

I also would like to take the occasion of the Ambassador Davidson's presence here to reiterate a point that many of you have heard our delegation espouse for several years, which is that OSCE can never be better than the quality of its leadership. And with Ambassador Davidson being in the position that he is in Bosnia and Herzegovina as head of the mission, that is an example of what we need to strive for throughout all of our missions and throughout the organization. And when that point is achieved, we will be even more effective than we are today, so thank you for the leadership that you are providing Ambassador Davidson.

We very strongly support Ambassador Davidson's call for the OSCE to "play to its strengths", something that we should do again everywhere rather than simply duplicating the work of others. Bosnia is host to a great number of international organizations, each one contributing something, and something different, to a common set of goals.

In order to be most effective, the OSCE Mission in Bosnia should indeed utilize its strengths — the most significant of which is the fact that it has such a widespread presence throughout the country. With 21 field offices, the OSCE's presence is felt across Bosnia, and is unparalleled by any other organization.

Overall, taking into account all areas of involvement by the international community, the United States is pleased with the progress being made in Bosnia.

In December, the Mission closed five Political Resource Centers, with the statement that the objectives of those centers had been achieved. Success in steering political parties toward a focus on policy rather than on ethnicity sends a great message to the people of Bosnia—and to the world for that matter and it also shows how far Bosnia has come since the 1990s.

The Mission in Bosnia has also made great progress in promoting access to information and government transparency. Using its presence throughout the country, the Mission is waging an aggressive campaign to raise awareness about the Freedom of Access to Information Act.

Other projects, such as the establishment of a parliamentary press gallery, serve to involve the populace in the political process. In order for democracy to thrive, we note that the people of Bosnia need to, indeed must get involved. The OSCE Mission in Bosnia is doing an excellent job of promoting this.

As you all know, the wonderful maxim that 'democracy is not a spectator sport', it is a contact sport, it is a participatory sport.

The Declaration resulting from the recent ministerial conference on the return of displaced persons symbolizes Bosnia's commitment to human rights and the ability of the region's ethnicities to cooperate. The United States stands willing to help in the implementation of this plan and hopes to see it accomplished by the end of 2006.

We were also encouraged to hear Republika Srpska had upheld its pledge to destroy 104 battle tanks and 35 pieces of artillery in December. A reduction in both heavy weapons and small arms will further help to ensure a lasting peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There remain, however, some major areas also of concern.

As Ambassador Davidson stated, Republika Srpska's failure to arrest war criminals wanted by The Hague is severely hurting Bosnia. While the surrender of Savo Todović was a positive first step, the Republika Srpska must do more to show that it is fully cooperating with The Hague Tribunal. The United States calls on the Republika Srpska to turn over all indicted war criminals immediately. It has been much, much, much too long. Both NATO and the EU have made clear that full cooperation with the ICTY is a prerequisite for integration.

It also is imperative that the parties in Bosnia agree on a statewide police structure. The European Commission has made it very clear that such a structure is necessary to meet the requirements for moving forward with negotiations towards integration.

Ambassador Davidson, we would like to thank you and your staff once again for your commitment, for your efforts, for your hard work, for your thoughtfulness and for visiting with us here in Vienna today and extend to you our best wishes for continued success in the work ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.